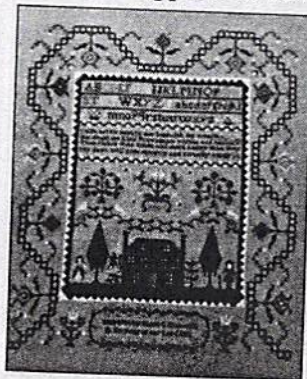


Sustaining the folk arts

If you drop by The Clipper's office (which we hope you will), a look around will show walls decorated with painted works-on-wood of scenes of Duxbury, ancient and modern. The works are lovingly executed, mainly on old breadboards. The painted borders of the scenes depicted are themselves an art -- dark brown with gilt stencils varying from piece to piece. The scenes and their borders shine with a gloss from what appears to be shellac.



A sampler by Guild member Janet Bianculi.

This art is the work of Roberta Sumner Cutler (1917-1995), co-founder of The Clipper. The pieces date to between 1987 and 1990, when Mrs. Cutler was over 70. Painting on wood is an ancient art practiced in European villages and by great artists -- Rembrandt among them. We don't know when the gifted Bobbie Cutler learned the New England form of the craft, but her production of painted works, tables, chairs and clocks was prodigious. Bobbie was a woman in a hurry. Near the end of her own

life she gave an ancient art breathtaking new life.

The spirit of sustaining folk art is very much alive at the Duxbury Free Library, where for the last ten years the Mayflower Sampler Guild has met monthly in the Merry Room. In the display case outside the Merry Room (on the DFL's bottom level), there is currently a remarkable exhibit of Guild members' modern samplers.

The New England sampler's origin was in 16th-century England. A sampler is a piece of needlework embroidery done by a girl, usually featuring the alphabet in capital and small letters; often a moral quotation; and sometimes a depiction of the girl's home. It shows the opportunities girls had and their limitations. The alphabet symbolizes literacy, which, unlike girls in many countries, American girls had -- with increasing importance in each new century. The medium of needlepoint symbolizes the weaving and dressmaking that awaited them as women.

The Mayflower Sampler Guild was founded by Denise De More of Crescent Street in 2003 with eight other interested women. Its mission is "to promote the art of sampler-making, both historic and contemporary; the study of sampler history; and the preservation of antique samplers." To the layman's eye the modern samplers now on exhibit show a high degree of skill. Ancient samplers bring the artificer to life in all her girlhood and in the humanity she shares with the living.

The Guild meets once a month in the Merry Room and is especially grateful to Arthur Adler, a member of DFL's maintenance staff, who opens the building and makes sure everyone's needs are taken care of. All donations are given to charity, and the Guild has made a successful effort to get historic museums from the North Shore to the Cape to display their stores of historic samplers.

Keeping folk arts alive serves many purposes: It teaches history. It preserves aspects of the culture from which modern America emerged and can draw unity. It teaches humility, in that it reminds us that our forebears did beautiful work with none of the electronic gadgets we take for granted. It encourages us, the living, to slow down, to pick up hand-held tools, and to work with one another to perpetuate the art of hand-made creation.

— D.A. Mittell, Jr.



Lynn Mannsmann with her Quaker sampler.